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ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4931  
INFO AMEMBASSY ASUNCION  
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA  
AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO  
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

[REDACTED] BUENOS AIRES 1919  
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ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)  
U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS  
Margaret P. Grafeld, Director  
(☒) Release ( ) Excise ( ) Deny  
Exemption(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
Declassify: ( ) In Part (☒) In Full  
( ) Classify as \_\_\_\_\_ ( ) Extend as \_\_\_\_\_ ( ) Downgrade to \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_ Declassify on \_\_\_\_\_ Reason \_\_\_\_\_

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2  
TAGS: SHUM, AR  
SUBJECT: RUMORS OF BODIES DISPOSED AT SEA

1. DURING THE PAST MONTH STORIES CIRCULATED IN BUENOS AIRES CONCERNING BODIES THAT HAD BEEN WASHED ASHORE ON BEACHES IN THE GENERAL AREA OF MAR DE AJO--AN AREA ON THE ATLANTIC COAST ABOUT MIDWAY BETWEEN BUENOS AIRES AND MAR DEL PLATA. ONE SUCH STORY--REGARDING TWO BODIES--WAS PICKED UP IN THE LOCAL PRESS. ACCOUNTS OF BETWEEN 35 AND 40 BODIES WERE GIVEN US BY CONTACTS OF THE EMBASSY, BUT WITHOUT ANY KIND OF CONFIRMATION.

2. PERMANENT ASSEMBLY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS VICE PRESIDENT EMILIO MIGNONE (STRICTLY PROTECT) MADE AN INVESTIGATORY TRIP TO THE AREA AND HAS WRITTEN A REPORT WHICH IMPLIES A LINK BETWEEN THESE OCCURRENCES AND THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT'S ANTI-TERRORIST ACTIVITIES.

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3. FOLLOWING IS EMBASSY'S TRANSLATION OF THE REPORT MIGNONE PREPARED:

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"A THOROUGH VISIT MADE DURING FEBRUARY TO THE BEACHES OF GENERAL LAVALLE DISTRICT, BUENOS AIRES PROVINCE (SAN CLEMENTE DEL TUYU, LAS TONINAS, SANTA TERESITA, MAR DEL TUYM, LUCILA DEL MAR, SAN BERNARDO Y MAR DE AJO) HAS SUBSTANTIATED THE FOLLOWING:

"BETWEEN JUNE 1977 AND JANUARY 1978, 16 BODIES WERE THROWN UP UPON THE LISTED BEACHES FROM THE SEA. ALL WERE IN STATE OF DECOMPOSITION AND WERE WITHOUT CLOTHES. ACCORDING TO DOCTORS WHO INVESTIGATED THEY HAD BEEN IN THE WATER NOT LESS THAN 15 DAYS. THE MAJORITY HAD BEEN DECAPITATED AND THE HANDS CUT OFF TO MAKE IDENTIFICATION DIFFICULT. IN ONE CASE IT WAS POSSIBLE TO SEND THE HANDS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF POLICE IN LA PLATA, BUT NO REPLY HAS BEEN GIVEN BY THE POLICE SO FAR. IT SHOULD BE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT THEY BELONGED TO YOUNG PEOPLE, FOR THE MOST PART WOMEN.

"ACCORDING TO INFORMATION PUBLISHED DURING FEBRUARY BY THE DAILY "LA NACION", TWO BODIES IN THE SAME CONDITIONS APPEARED ON THE BEACH OF VILLA GESELL, FURTHER TO THE SOUTH.

PEOPLE OF THAT RESORT AREA AFFIRMED THAT DURING JANUARY 41 BODIES APPEARED IN SIMILAR CIRCUMSTANCES IN MAR DEL PLATA.

"THE INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THE FIRST PARAGRAPH CONCERNING THE BEACH TOWNS OF GENERAL LAVALLE DISTRICT ARE CORROBORATED BY TESTIMONY OF THE POLICE THAT MADE THE OFFICIAL COUNT, FORENSIC PHYSICIANS AND OTHER OFFICIALS AND PASSERSBY (BATHERS, FIREMEN, NEIGHBORS, ETC.).

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"NEIGHBORS AT THE ABOVE MENTIONED BEACH AREAS STATE THAT THE BODIES ARE WASHED ASHORE WHEN THERE IS WIND FROM THE SOUTH. THEY ARE CONVINCED THAT THEY HAVE BEEN THROWN INTO THE SEA BY AIRCRAFT OF THE NAVY FROM NEARBY BASES, WHICH THEY SEE FLYING FREQUENTLY OVER THE AREA. SOME NEIGHBORS AFFIRMED HAVING SEEN BUNDLES FALLING FROM THE AIRCRAFT.

"IF ONE CONSIDERS THAT THE NUMBER OF BODIES THROWN UP FROM THE SEA IS SMALLER THAN THE TOTAL NUMBER--ESPECIALLY TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION THAT BODIES MIGHT BE THROWN WEIGHTED IN ORDER TO SINK THEM--ONE IS FACED WITH ONE EXPLANATION FOR THE DISAPPEARANCES OF PEOPLE. THIS MIGHT EXPLAIN AN AFFIRMATION BY THE NAVY THAT IT HAS NOT A SINGLE PRISONER."

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4. EMBASSY COMMENTS. EMBASSY OFFICERS DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS HAVE HEARD RUMORS THAT MILITARY AIRCRAFT HAVE BEEN USED TO DUMP AT SEA THE BODIES OF SLAIN TERRORISTS. ACCORDING TO SOME REPORTS PLANES DEPARTED FROM CAMPO DE MAYO AIRFIELD. (DAO SOURCES, HOWEVER, CAN NEITHER CONFIRM OR DENY THESE CLAIMS.) OTHER REPORTS EXIST OF BODIES WASHED UP ON THE URUGUAYAN SHORE. EARLIER REPORTS OF WASHED-UP BODIES DID NOT, HOWEVER, AVER MUTILIATION. WE CANNOT, HOWEVER, ACCEPT MIGNONE'S STATEMENT AT FACE VALUE. THE VILLA GESELL ENUMERATION LOOKS FLIMSY, AND THE FINAL SENTENCE HAS A POLEMICAL TOUCH THAT DETRACTS FROM OTHER INFORMATION. ASSOCIATED PRESS, WHICH WAS GIVEN THE STORY--PRESUMABLY BY THE PERMANENT ASSEMBLY--REFUSED TO USE IT ON GROUNDS THAT NO SEPARATE CONFIRMATION WAS AVAILABLE. WHILE OTHER EMBASSY AGENCIES DO NOT DISAGREE THAT THE MIGNONE REPORT COULD HAVE SOME FACTUAL BASIS, THEY HAVE NO INFORMATION FROM THEIR SOURCES WHICH WOULD CONFIRM THE REPORT.  
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